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VIII.—*On the Vegetable and Animal Food of the Natives of Australia in reference to social position, with a comparison between the Australians and some other Races of Man.* By JOHN CRAWFURD, Esq., F.R.S.

[*Read March 26th,* 1867.]

I LATELY received, through the kindness of Sir Charles Nicholson, a scientific statement of all the esculent native plants of the colony of Queensland, a territory the extensive bounds of which, embracing tropical, subtropical, and temperate climates of Australia, may be considered a fair average for the whole continent.

The list is drawn up by Mr. A. Thozet, a skilful and experienced botanist, now a permanent settler in Australia. Its possession suggested the idea of drawing up an account of the vegetable and animal food of the aborigines of Australia, and such is the purpose of this paper. Before doing so, however, I shall attempt to give a rapid outline of the great and eccentric region concerned.

The continent of Australia is, then, about twice the extent of China, and three times the extent of Hindustan. It is, however, by no means valuable to man in proportion to its extent, for the continent of Africa excepted, there is no great portion of the earth's surface which compared to extent contains so large an amount of worthless desert. About one-third part of Australia is strictly tropical, a third subtropical, and a third temperate. Unlike Europe, Asia, and America, it is destitute of great mountain chains. It has but *one* range, called or miscalled the Australian Alps. This runs at no remote distance from the eastern coast, and therefore influences but a small portion of the continent. Its height does not exceed one-half that of the Alps of Europe, and is not equal to one-third of that of the Alps of America, or one-fourth of the Alps of Asia. Australia, then, has no great chain of mountains of elevation sufficient to generate a cold adequate to the precipitation of the rain of passing clouds, and therefore it is eminently hot and dry, with fitful visitations of torrents of rain which inundate the low lands. The tropical part of Australia is subject to the influence of the south-east and north-west monsoons, but with less regularity than in lands lying north of it and still south of the equator, and with a great deal less than under the monsoons which prevail to the north of the equator. The absence of any great chain of mountains precludes the existence of great navigable rivers similar to those of the other great quarters of the globe. It has no Mississippi or Hudson, no Yantse, Ganges, or Euphrates, no Nile or Niger, no Danube or Rhine, —not even a Seine or a Thames.

Australia, in every sense more new to us than what is called "the New World," was not known to Europeans until the first years of the seventeenth century, and even then rather seen than discovered; and this was above a century after America had been discovered,—even partially colonised, and its products had become familiar to Europeans.

Australia is singular in its physical geography, in its climates, in its vegetable and in its animal productions, man included, for here he is of the same uniform black over 30° of latitude, while in corresponding climates of the earth's surface—America excepted, where he is red—he is fair, black, brown, red, and yellow.

The total number of the esculent plants of Queensland, which extends over 20° of latitude, is forty-seven, which Mr. Thozet divides into three classes. The first of these includes such as are eaten raw, or without preparation, and they amount to thirty-six, being, therefore, the bulk of the whole. The second class, which includes also a few of the first, amounts to nine, and they embrace plants, or parts of plants, which require baking only to render them edible. The third class includes plants which are poisonous without pounding, edulcoration, and exsiccation, and they amount to six. The first category includes fruits, but as none of the native fruits of Australia are comparable in flavour to a crab-apple, and the rest are but very poor food, this class requires no further notice. The two last are the only ones of any importance, and as they must have furnished the main vegetable diet of the native Australians, I transcribe this part of Mr. Thozet's list as a curious record of the vegetable poverty of Australia, in so far as human food is concerned.

WITH PREPARATION.

BAKED ONLY.

ROOTS.

PHASEOLUS Mungo, Linn. *Komin,* Rockh. tribe. *Kadolo,* Cleveland Bay tribe.

Found slightly twining among grass. Stems and branches, hairy. Leaflets three, narrow, 3 to 4 inches long, acute. Flowers, pale yellow. Pod cylindrical, 2 to 4 inches long. Roots the shape of small long carrots.

ACACIA Bidwilli, Benth. Bidwill's Acacia. *Waneu.*

Found usually in stony ridges. A small tree, prickly when young. Small leaflet fifteen to twenty-five pairs, one-eighth of an inch long. Roots of the young plants eatable.

DIOSCOREA punctata.

Large old roots.

BULBS, TUBERS, OR STEMS.

NYMPHÆA gigantea. The tubers.

APONOGETON sp. *Warrumbel,* Rockh. tribe. *Koornabaie,* Cleveland Bay tribe.

Found in shallow water in lagoons or ponds. A small aquatic plant. Leaves oblong, lying on the surface of the water. Rachis erect. Flowers numerous, small, and yellow. Bulbs spherical, ½ inch to 1 inch diameter.

DENDROBIUM canaliculatum, R. Br. *Yamberin.*

Very abundant on the decayed trunks and branches, principally of gum tree. (The bulbous stems, after being deprived of the old leaves, are eatable.)

HELOCHARIS sphacelata.

The small tubers, baked, are roughly pounded between two stones, and made in the same shape as almond cake.

STERCULIA quadrifida.

The mucilaginous substance of the unripe pod eatable.

AVICENNIA tomentosa, R. Br., Mangrove; *Egaie* (Clev. B. tribe); *Tagon Tagon* (Rockh. tribe).

A small tree, but sometimes attaining 18 inches in diameter; generally found on the estuaries of rivers and creeks. Small numerous roots protrude at the base of the crooked trunks. Leaves pale, green above, and white tomentose underneath. Fruit heart-shaped with two thick cotiledons. The aborigines of Cleveland Bay dig a hole in the ground, where they light a good fire; when well ignited they throw stones over it, which, when sufficiently heated, they arrange horizontally at the bottom, and lay on the top the *Egaie* fruit, sprinkling a little water over it; they cover it with bark, and over the whole earth is placed, to prevent the steam from evaporating too freely. During the time required for baking (about two hours), they dig another hole in the sand; the softened *Egaie* is put into it; they pour water twice over it, and the *Midamo* is now fit for eating. They resort to that sort of food during the wet season, when precluded from searching for any other. (Murrells' testimony.*)

Near Mount Elliot and Cleveland Bay, there is also an eatable root, *Wangoora*, probably a species of Ipomæa. The roots, very bitter, are cut in two, put into water for one hour or one hour and a half, and are afterwards baked for three or four hours, in the same way as the *Egaie;* they then carry it in a dilly bag (*Yella barba*) to the water's edge, where, by pouring water over and pressing it, they make the starch fall upon the bark in the same way as arrowroot falls from the cylinder into the trough; they wash it three or four times until the water is very clear, and the yellow fecula is then fit for use. (Murrells' testimony.)

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* The late James Murrells was a wrecked sailor, who lived seventeen years amongst one of the Cleveland Bay tribes, in Northern Queensland, Australia.

This plant may be the same as the one alluded to by Leichhardt, p. 284. "I tried several methods to render the potatoes which we had found in the camps of the natives eatable, but neither roasting nor boiling destroyed their sickening bitterness; at last I pounded and washed them, and procured the starch, which was entirely tasteless, but thickened rapidly in hot water like arrowroot, and was very agreeable to eat, wanting only the addition of sugar to make it delicious—at least, so we fancied."

(POISONOUS IN A RAW STATE.)

POUNDING, MACERATION, DESICCATION.

CALADIUM machrorhizon, Vent. *Hakkin,* Rockh. tribe. *Banganga* or *Nargan,* Clev. B. tribe.

Found in moist shady places. A strong herbaceous plant, with very large sagittate leaves. The young bulbs, of a light rose colour inside, found growing on large old rhizomes, are scraped, and divided in two parts, and put under the ashes for about half an hour. When sufficiently baked, they are then pounded by hard strokes between two stones—a large one, *Wallarie,* and a small one, *Kondola.* All the pieces which do not look farinaceous, but watery when broken, are thrown away; the others, by strokes of the *Kondola,* are united by two and threes, and put into the fire again; they are then taken out and pounded together in the form of a cake, which is again returned to the fire and carefully turned occasionally; this operation is repeated eight or ten times; and when the *Hakkin,* which is now of a green greyish colour, begins to harden, it is fit for use.

TYPHONIUM Brownii, Scott. *Merrin.*

A small herbaceous plant; found in sandy, shady places. Leaves sagittate entire or three lobate. Flowers purple, dark, of a disagreeable odour. The tubers, which are yellow inside, are manipulated in the same way as the *Hakkin,* but none are watery, and they are made to adhere together after the first roasting.

ENTADA scandens, Benth. *Barbaddah* (Cleveland Bay tribe).

A strong climber. Pod 2 to 4 feet in length, and 3 to 4 inches in breadth. The seeds 1½ to 2 inches diameter, are put into the stove oven and heated in the same way and for the same time as the *Egaie;* they are then pounded fine and put into a dilly bag, and left for ten or twelve hours in water, when they are fit for use. (Murrells' testimony.)

CYCAS media, R. Br. Nut palm; *Baveu.*

A graceful tree, with a crown of fruit the size of a walnut, yellow when ripe; very common on the mountain sides and in valleys. The nuts are deprived of their outer succulent cover (*sarcocarp*), and are then broken; and the kernels having been roughly pounded, are dried three or four hours by the sun, then brought in a dilly bag to the water stream or pond, where they remain in running water four or five days, and in stagnant water three or four days. By a touch of the fingers the proper degree of softness produced by maceration is ascertained. They are afterwards placed between the two stones mentioned, reduced to a fine paste, and then baked under the ashes in the same way that our bush people bake their damper.

POUNDING, MACERATION.

ENCEPHALARTOS Miquelii, F. Muell. Dwarf Zamia; *Banga.*

Found generally in the same locality as the palm nut, with a large cone fruit not unlike a pine-apple. The seeds, orange-red when ripe, and separating freely, are baked for about half an hour under ashes; the outside covers and the stones are then broken, and the kernels divided by a stroke of the *Kondola*, are put into a dilly bag and carried to a stream or pond, where they remain six or eight days before they are fit for eating.

ENCEPHALARTOS sp. Leichardt's arborescent Zamia.

Prepared in the same way as E. Miquilii.

I submitted the entire list of Mr. Thozet's esculent plants to the President of the Linnæan Society, my friend George Bentham, and the following are his judicious observations on it:—"I return Mr. Thozet's pamphlet, which is interesting as showing what kind of food uncivilised races, who do not cultivate vegetables or animals, are obliged to put up with. There is probably not one of the 'roots, tubers, bulbs, and fruits' that would ever be touched by those who could get a supply of wholesome grain or cultivated food-roots, and perhaps none either that could by any process of cultivation be brought up to the standard of those which have already been modified for human use; whilst several may probably not unfrequently poison the hungry savage who resorts to them, as Hooker tells me is frequently the case with starving races he has come across, who are obliged to have recourse to indigenous roots. Mr. Thozet tells us that the only ones to be had in great abundance are those of his third category, which are poisonous in a raw state. Mr. Thozet, I learn, is a very zealous, active, intelligent, and persevering naturalist, settled at Rockhampton, and devoting himself to his adopted country and property; and his 'Notes' may prove useful to those who may be lost in the trackless wilds of the interior without any food but what they can pick up in the raw wild state."

The natives of Australia were far better provided with animal than with vegetable food. I can speak with the more confidence on this subject since I have taken care to consult the highest living authority on the subject, that of the distinguished naturalist Mr. John Gould. Nothing of animal life comes amiss to the ever-hungry Australians, who devour alike all mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, and insects. Their best supply is furnished by the family of kangaroos, of which Mr. Gould reckons near forty species of various genera, some weighing no more than two pounds, and some weighing two hundred pounds. We have then the wombats, or phascolumys of naturalists, and the bundicoots, or phalangista. These are followed by the great bats, "when," says Mr. Gould, "the natives can catch them." Fish taken by spearing, or by rude nets, are largely consumed, and a stranded whale is gloated on. Captain Grey, now Sir George Grey, says that it was "an unseemly sight to see an

Australian virgin issuing from the body of a whale, besmeared with oil, and bearing handfuls of blubber." Wild honey is, of course, in great request. But the Australians are indiscriminate, for among their dainties are the large caterpillars which feed on the wattle-tree, and the larvæ of a black ant. "I found," says Mr. Gould, "the caterpillars, when nicely roasted over a wood fire, very good; but the ants' eggs made me sick."

With the exception of the dog and a few mice, all the mammalia of Australia, whether herbaceous or carnivorous, and whether fossil or extant, belong to the inferior family of marsupials, or those in which the perfection of the young requires two distinct gestations, one in the womb and one in a pouch. This strange region of the earth was even more remarkable for the plants and animals which it wanted than for those it possessed. It had no cereal, no good esculent roots, bulb or tuber, or fruit amenable to cultivation. The coco-palm, the banana, and the yam, so general in all other tropical regions, did not exist in the tropical part of Australia. All the domestic animals which, by furnishing man with food or labour, are indispensable to the effectual advancement of civilisation, were absent. The race of man himself differed from all other races of mankind, and was the same lean, lank, black being over the 30° of latitude, which extends from 11° south of the equator to 43° beyond it, partaking of the same physical and intellectual inferiority which characterises the lower mammalia inhabiting the same land with him.

The Australians had attained the first elementary steps towards civilisation, for they had constructed language, had invented the art of kindling fire, and of cooking their food with it. They had acquired the art of fabricating rude tools and weapons, and had made the usual progress in the indispensable arts of hunting and fishing. With their admitted inferiority of capacity, and with the privations under which they laboured, it is difficult to imagine them to have been able to advance beyond the condition in which they were when first seen by civilised man, a condition which they may have reached long before the time when the Egyptians had constructed the earliest of their pyramids. They were doomed, in short, to stand fast after making the first elementary steps towards progress.

No race of man, however highly endowed, could have attained any considerable amount of social advancement in the inauspicious condition of the Australians, whose extreme savagery seems to have rendered all intercourse with races of higher quality and greater attainments, from whom they might have received instruction, impossible. This is attested by the fact that their many languages are not found to contain even a single word of those foreign tongues which, even in the languages of their immediate neighbours, the Papuans of New Guinea, and in all those of the islanders of the Pacific, black or brown, exist in more or less number.

The inauspicious position in which nature placed the Australian race will account for the lowly condition in which they were found. Yet when we find other races of man placed under equal, or even greater natural impediments to progress, making greater advances, we are obliged to infer a special stolidness in the character of the Australians. The subject is of such ethnological interest that a few examples may with advantage be given in proof of the proposition I am now assuming, and I begin with the Esquimaux. Instead of the genial climate enjoyed by the Australians, they are condemned to the most rigorous one in which man can live. They have no vegetable food at all, and to supply the indispensable carbonaceous element, have to drink fish oil and bolt blubber. Their animal food was less various, and the animals which composed it more difficult of capture than those of the Australians, for it was not the kangaroo, the oppossum, or wombat that they had to deal with, but the seal, the walrus, the whale, and the polar bear. The only mammal that could live in the domestic state in their rigorous climate was the dog, but they trained it to far better purpose than the Australians, for they had made it a valuable assistant in the chase, and broken it in to draw their sledges. The stone and bone tools and weapons of the Esquimaux were far more skilfully fashioned than those of the Australians. With ample stores of timber, the Australian boat was by no means comparable to a Welsh coracle; while the Esquimaux, with nothing but driftwood to rely on, constructed stout boats, which they skilfully navigated in pursuit of the whale, the walrus, and the bear. Clothing and dwellings were, no doubt, more indispensable to the Esquimaux than to the Australians, but the Esquimaux had well-made clothing and warm houses, although their only fuel was fish bones, while the Australians can hardly be said to have had either clothing or houses at all. Such facts as these appear to be ample and satisfactory evidence of the relative intellectual capacities of the two races.

I think it is capable of satisfactory proof that even the pigmy Negroes of the Andaman Islands are intellectually more highly gifted than the Australians. Their position in the matter of physical geography is unquestionably more adverse. Thus, instead of the auspicious climate of Australia, they have a tempestuous one, in which it rains for half the year. As to vegetable food, they are without a corn, an esculent root, a bulb, or a tuber, and without an eatable fruit, for they want even the coco-palm and the banana, both which exist abundantly in all the countries nearest to them, east, west, north, and south, and this at very moderate distances. Their vegetable diet, as far as we know, is confined to a coarse wild bean, and the unpalatable fruit of the mangrove, which the hogs of other countries would not partake of. The sole game of their dense and almost impenetrable forest was a small species of wild hog, difficult, under such circumstances, of capture. For animal food, therefore, they have to rely on molluscs, fish, and reptiles, and, as they have neither rivers nor lakes, they are driven to the coast and open sea in search of them. Their principal game is the turtle, and they are adroit in its capture. When first described by civilised man, the implements of the Andaman islanders were like those of other rude people, of stone, bone, or wood; but as soon as the wrecks of European ships presented iron to them, they dropped their celts or stone axes, and began to make them of iron, forging knives, arrow and spear heads of it, with hammers and anvils of stone, as no doubt did all races of man when they first began to substitute iron for meaner materials. Even from these few facts I cannot doubt but that the diminutive Negroes of the Andaman islands are mentally a more highly endowed race than the tall, gaunt, and unseemly Australians.

New Guinea is one of the largest, if not, indeed, the very largest island in the world, and at one point it is within sixty miles of the tropical part of Australia, its *Flora* and *Fauna* partaking in some degree of the character of those of the latter. It is, however, inhabited by a peculiar race of Negroes, whom we call, from the corruption of a Malay word which has the sense of "woolly," Papuans, a race wholly different from their neighbours the Australians, and one apparently superior to them in bodily and mental capacity. Many of them are, no doubt, in the lowest savage condition, but some, who have enjoyed better opportunities, have made such a rudimental advance as places them far above the Australians. Thus, although the Papuans have no cereal, they cultivate the yam, the coco-palm, the sago-palm, and the banana, while they have domesticated the dog, the hog, and the common fowl. They are frequently well housed, in barn-like dwellings, raised on piles like the lake villages of the primitive Swiss. They have acquired a knowledge of the preparation and use of malleable iron from the Malayan race, and they have stout boats in which they not only navigate along their own shores, but hold intercourse with the satellite islands of New Guinea, and occasionally venture on committing piracies in the seas of the eastern portion of the Malayan Archipelago.

There is satisfactory evidence to show that even the Negrito tribes of the South Pacific, albeit atrocious cannibals, are a race greatly superior to the Australians, for they cultivate the coco-palm, the banana, the yam, the batata, and the esculent caladium, and had at least one domestic animal, the hog, the possession of which may, perhaps, have mitigated their propensity to feed on their own kind. They were clothed, not indeed in any woven tissue, but in what may be called a "vegetable felt," made with considerable skill from the paper mulberry. They were not houseless wanderers, but lived in villages; and they possessed boats, in which they sailed from island to island, of their own group.

But the most striking example of superiority of other races over the Australian, is to be found in a comparison between it and that brown race of man which has the same physical form and the same language from the Tropic of Cancer to New Zealand. When first seen, this race had already attained as high a social position as could consist with their privations and isolation. The countries they inhabited had generally the same climates as those of the Australians, and although the tropical portion of their country, being that in which their peculiar civilisation probably originated, had some advantage as to esculent vegetables over Australia, other portions were even worse off; while as to animal food, none of them had the variety or plenty possessed by the Australians. When first seen by Europeans, such of this race as dwelt within the tropics were no longer naked houseless wanderers, but men clothed in the vegetable felt already alluded to: they had fixed habitations, constructed with tolerable skill, and well-built boats skilfully navigated, in which they made voyages of several hundred miles, and in two cases, although probably compulsory, of several thousands, when they migrated south as far as New Zealand, and eastward as far as Easter Island, not above a couple of thousand miles from the western shore of America. They were found to be agriculturists, and already they were cultivating the coco-palm, the bread-fruit, the banana, the yam, the batata, and even the orange, while they were in possession of three domestic animals, the dog, the hog, and the common fowl.

That they did not repel, like the Australians, all intercourse and commixture with strangers in a more advanced state than themselves, is sufficiently attested by the fact that their language contains some essential words of the Malayan languages, among which may be reckoned the names of some tools and implements, the whole numeral system of the Malays, and the names of some cultivated plants, as those of the coco-palm, the yam, and the sugar-cane.

Even if we suppose all the plants cultivated by the brown Polynesians to be indigenous to the tropical islands, it is reasonable at least to infer from their Malayan names that it was strangers who instructed the natives in the art of cultivating them. To strangers also we may safely infer they owed their three domestic animals, although they are not known under foreign names. We infer that they were imported from the fact that neither the hog, the dog, or the common fowl, are found in the wild state in any island of the Northern or Southern Pacific. With respect to the common fowl, more especially, it exists in no country, even Malayan, in the wild state east of Sumatra, Java, and the Philippines, in the forests of which, however, it is abundant, while in all these countries it has been immemorially domesticated. From one or other of these countries, it is reasonable to believe that it must have reached the brown race of the tropical islands of the Pacific.

Even with their scanty provision of vegetable and animal food, we can imagine a still higher degree of civilisation than had been attained to have sprung up among the brown Polynesians, had the physical geography of their country been more propitious. But the tropical islands in which their civilisation most probably originated were but scattered islets, too limited to give room for the growth of a nation by numbers and strength of sufficient power to maintain its own independence, and to afford leisure for cultivating the arts of peace. The only one of the islands of the Southern Pacific large enough to have done so was New Zealand, and it laboured under peculiar privations of its own. It had no good indigenous esculent vegetables, and hardly a mammal at all, and not even a bird amenable to domestication. It was a colony from the tropical islands, and the emigrants, therefore, could not transplant into their new abode any plant purely tropical. They took with them and propagated only such as would grow in the temperate climate of the northern island, as the yam, the batata, and the caladium. In the long and perilous voyage which they had to perform, they succeeded in bringing with them the dog only, and in a land where there was little suitable food, it did not multiply as it would have done under more favourable conditions, and it was consequently scarce.

In the absence of cultivable plants, beyond the very few they had brought along with them, the scarcity of all animals for food, and the absolute want of any amenable to domestication, it was impossible for the New Zealanders to have been anything else than what they were found to be, that is, arrant savages and systematic cannibals. However highly gifted, to have made any approach to the civilisation which Egyptians, Hindus, and Chinese had made thousands of years ago, was impossible. Had even our own forefathers, the Britons who in the time of Cæsar possessed corn and cattle, laboured under the same privations as the New Zealanders, they must, like them, have been savages and most probably even cannibals.

But we may indulge our fancy by contemplating what the fortune of the New Zealanders, left to themselves, might have been had they, like most of the races of the old world, but possessed cereals and other esculent vegetables, and a few of the larger quadrupeds for food and labour. The potato and the hog were bestowed upon them by Capt. Cook at the beginning of the last quarter of the eighteenth century; and they had already cultivated the first and bred the last so successfully in the first years of the present century as to be able to furnish them as provisions to European shipping. Ever since their virtual subjugation by a superior race at the highest point of civilisation, they have, with no inconsiderable success, adopted European arts and manners. With such capacity for advancement, being of one race, speaking one language, and occupying a large, rich, and almost continuous territory, with a temperate climate, may we not contemplate the growth of a civilised and powerful Maori nation? Under such auspices as I have supposed, the New Zealanders could hardly have failed in time to have discovered, as all the nations of the old world enjoying the same advantages had done, and this at many independent points, the art of making malleable iron. As with these the other useful metals would have followed; and as to gold, it was in the loose alluvial earth almost under their feet. In time, they would even have invented written language, as did many rude tribes of India, of Java, Sumatra, and the Philippines.

The people to whom the New Zealanders bear the nearest resemblance, in geographical position, in climate, in physical geography, and in extent of territory, are the Japanese, and we can fancy a Maori nation equalling the Japanese in civilisation and in number, remaining like them independent, and, like them also, with little communication with strangers. With equal advantages, we can fancy no such advancement in the Australians, who, although corn and cattle have been presented to them in abundance during three generations, have never grown a plant or bred an animal, but are now the same naked, houseless, wandering savages, living on the wild productions of the earth, that they were when first seen by civilised man.

It might seem at first view as if nature had formed the Australians on a low scale, to meet the poverty of the land in which they were destined to live, in the same manner in which it constituted the Esquimaux to live amidst perpetual ice and snow, where no other race of man could live. Yet, in this land, seemingly the predestined abode of irretrievable savages, there now live and flourish colonies of another race of man differently endowed, and which, in three short generations, have laid the foundation of a powerful and civilised empire.